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ABSTRACT

To assess the current state of diversity in the curriculum, journalism and mass communication programs across the country were surveyed as to how they treat minorities and how they deal with diversity in the curriculum--in separate courses, integrated into existing courses, or in a variety of options in which students are exposed to diversity issues. Respondents were asked specifically if separate courses were offered dealing with a number of groups: women, African Americans, ethnic minorities, and Gays and Lesbians, with special attention to courses in journalism and mass communication history. Respondents were also asked to list any other courses that spent time dealing with any of these issues, how many students enrolled in the class, and how often it was offered. Surveys were mailed to chairs or directors of 421 schools and departments in the United States listed in the Association of Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) directory. Responses were received from 72, for a response rate of 17.5%. The 72 respondents reported an enrollment of nearly 22,000 students; 13,000 in public institutions and 9,000 in private institutions. The majority of the respondents (54) reported they did offer at least one course addressing diversity and minority topics, but that enrollment was usually low, the average being 15 per class. The greatest number of courses offered dealt with gender issues in the media, followed by those devoted to African Americans or race issues. No overall changes or trends were reported. (Contains 8 notes and an appendix listing schools surveyed.) (NKA)

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The State of Diversity in the Curriculum of the Nation's Journalism and Mass Communication Programs

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The State of Diversity in the Curriculum of the Nation's Journalism and Mass Communication Programs

In the last decade there has been increasing discussion, within both the scholarly community and the public sphere, of the importance of diversity and minority issues in the media. While many journalism and mass communication programs have begun to integrate material on these issues into the curriculum of standing courses to a certain degree, most have been slow to adopt courses that deal specifically with these issues. Funding restrictions, staff limitations, perceived disinterest in the general student body, the abundance of other required courses, and even the lack of scholarly interest or expertise among the faculty are often cited as possible reasons for this hesitation to include such courses in the curriculum.

There is an ongoing debate as to whether such material should be offered in separate courses or integrated throughout the curriculum. Detractors of the first solution argue that specific courses on diversity and minority issues "ghettoize" this material and that they speak only to a small population of students interested in these issues. Those who support separate courses also support the idea of integrating diversity issues into the curriculum, but believe this is a gradual process that will take time. They argue that until complete integration is possible, "recuperative" work concerning women, African Americans, ethnic, racial, and religious minorities, gays and lesbians, and the many groups so often ignored or passed over in text books, reading assignments, and class lectures, is necessary.

In an attempt to assess the current state of diversity in the curriculum, journalism and mass communication programs across the country were surveyed as

to how they treat minorities and diversity in the curriculum -- in separate courses, integrated into existing courses, or in a variety of options in which students are exposed to diversity issues. The survey asked respondents specifically if separate courses were offered dealing with a number of groups: women, African Americans, Ethnic Minorities, and Gays and Lesbians, with speciial attention to courses in journalism or mass communication history. It also asked respondents to list any other courses that contributed significant portions of the semester to any of these issues. Finally, it asked respondents to indicate the approximate number of students enrolled in the class and how often it was offered.

Respondents

The survey was mailed in early February 1995 to the chairs or directors of the 421 schools and departments in the United States listed in the 1995 AEJMC Directory. Of the 421, seventy-two responded (response rate of 17.5 percent). (See Appendix A for a list of programs that responded.) These represented a mix of departments and schools of journalism, mass communication, media studies, and communication. Of those that responded, thirty-seven were private institutions, thirty-five were public.

The schools and departments that responded also represented a wide range in the number of majors enrolled; the seventy-two were therefore broken down into three groups by size. Schools with fewer than 100 majors were labelled "small;" of the respondents thirteen identified themselves in this category. Schools with between 101 and 300 majors were labelled "medium;" twenty-nine of the respondents fell in this range. Finally, schools with more than 301 majors were labelled "large;" thirty of the respondents fell in this range.

The seventy-two schools and departments reported a total enrollment of

nearly 22,000 students; 13,000 of these attended public and 9,000 attended private institutions.

Findings: Number of Courses and Enrollment

Of the seventy-two schools and departments responding to the survey, eighteen (25 percent) reported they offered no courses specifically addressing diversity and minority issues. Most, however, indicated that if they did not offer specific courses, they integrated diversity and minority issues into standing courses. Typically the courses they named were: "Introduction to Mass Communication;" "Media and Society;" "Communication Theory;" "Popular Culture;" "Media Analysis/Criticism;" and "Journalism/Mass Communication History."

The majority (fifty-four) of the respondents, however, reported that they offered at least one course on diversity topics in their curriculum. In fact, several schools and departments offered two or more courses in the curriculum, with a few reporting they offered three, one reporting four separate courses, another five, and yet another six. About half these courses were offered at least once a year while the other half were offered less than once a year -- once every three semesters, every other year, only occasionally, or "on demand."

As for enrollment, the programs offering these courses reported that numbers were usually low, the average being fifteen students per class, with some having as few as six students, though a few enrolled as many as forty. The total number of students enrolled in courses on diversity in these seventy-two schools and departments is approximately 2,500, that is, 11.3 percent of their majors.[1]

Findings: Specific Courses Offered

The fifty-four programs that did offer specific courses in diversity or

minority issues demonstrated a wide range of creativity and in all, ninety-six different course titles were reported. The greatest number of courses dealing with a specific subject were those devoted to women or gender, with forty separate course titles reported, the most common being some variation on "Women and the Media." Other course titles in this category included: "Gender Issues and the Media/Mass Communication/Journalism;" "Women, Men and Journalism/Media;" "Gendered Communication/Rhetoric;" "Media and Feminism/Feminine Theory;" "Gender and Intercultural Communication;" and "Sex, Gender, and Communication." Also offered were two very specific courses, "Nineteenth-Century Newspaperwomen" and "Women Writers."

The second largest number of courses dealing with a specific subject were those devoted to African Americans or Race Issues, with thirteen separate course titles listed. These included: "African Americans/Blacks in/and the Media/Mass Communication;" "Race and Ethnicity in the Media;" "History of African American/Black Press;" "Media, Race and Social Change;" "Media and Social Change: The African American Rights Movement;" "News Coverage of Racial Issues;" and "Black Rhetoric."

Ethnic and minority concerns were specifically addressed by nine separate courses using titles such as: "Minorities and the Media;" "Minority Voices in Communication;" "Ethnic Press; and "Ethnic Diversity in U.S. Journalism." This last course, offered at San Francisco State University claimed the distinction of being the only course on diversity required of all majors.

Of the groups specifically mentioned on the survey, the one to have the fewest courses devoted to its study was gays and lesbians. Only three course titles focused specifically on this group: "Gay Media and Politics;" "Media and Social Change: The Gay and Lesbian Rights Movement;" "Gay and Lesbian Film."[2]

Many of the respondents offered courses that dealt with or included diversity issues in a broader fashion, listing thirteen separate course titles. Some addressed diversity specifically, as in courses with a variation of the name "Diversity in Mass Media/Communication," while others focused on several minority groups, as in "Women and Minorities in the Media." Several of the courses described were broader in their focus, but in the mind of the respondents at least gave significant attention to the issue of diversity or minority issues. Some of these course titles were: "Community and Alternative Media;" "Media Stereotypes;" "Social Movements and the Media;" and "Rhetoric of Dissent."

Finally, the respondents reported another seventeen courses whose titles indicated that they included a significant amount of material on minority groups and diversity issues. These included: "Cultural/Intercultural Communication;" "Media and Cultural Diversity;" "Media and Social Activism;" "Press and the Third World;" and "Communication Across Barriers."

Findings: Programs Most Likely to Offer Courses.

One of the goals of this study was to discover if any particular type of institution -- public or private, large or small -- would be more likely to offer courses on diversity than others. Based on the responses of the seventy-two schools and departments that participated in this study, it was found that programs in private institutions on the whole were more likely to offer specific courses in diversity[3] and that those in large private programs were the most likely to offer these courses.[4] The second most likely programs to offer courses in diversity were in large public institutions.[5]

The same pattern was repeated in medium-sized institutions. with private institutions leading in the number of courses they offered.[6] Only in the category of small programs -- those with fewer than 100 students -- did public

institutions lead with the number of courses offered per year per program.[7]

Findings: Trends

Another goal of this survey was to determine if there were any trends regarding diversity in the journalism and mass communication curriculum -- if any particular areas were being developed, growing, or shrinking, and if so, if there was any explanation for this. Although the survey prompted respondents to indicate any such changes in their programs in regard to these courses, only a handful responded. There was little change overall and no trend could be identified. Four institutions -- two public, two private -- reported adding a new course to their curriculum in the past year. Of these, two dealt with women, one with race and gender, and one with minorities. Another department reported that it had dropped an undergraduate course on minorities with a plan to eventually reintroduce it as a graduate level course.

Two programs, the departments of journalism at San Francisco State University and Webster University, reported they required a course on diversity ("Ethnic Diversity and U.S. Culture" and "Media and Cultural Diversity," respectively) of all majors.

Findings: Attitude Toward Courses in Diversity

A more amorphous goal of this survey was to assess the general attitude or climate toward diversity topics in the journalism and mass communication curriculum. As a result of the response to this survey, several impressions were formed and conclusions reached. A first impression was that because of the relatively low response rate to the survey itself (less than 18 percent), diversity issues may not be very high on the agenda of those individuals to whom this survey was mailed -- department chairs and school directors. It might also be said, however, that the low response rate was reflective of the ongoing

controversy within the academic community over whether such material should be offered in separate courses or worked into the existing curriculum.

In fact, a few of the respondents indicated their leaning toward the latter viewpoint in their comments. Patsy Watkins, the head of the journalism program at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, for example, wrote: "Why segregate this diversity information into special courses that students probably won't take? [It's] better to incorporate information into required courses." "The department does not support a one course approach but believes in integration throughout the curriculum," wrote R. Ferrell Ervin of Southeast Missouri State University. "All courses deal with minorities and women. We do not have special courses in these topics," wrote Lee Becker of Ohio State University.

Of the seventy-two respondents to the survey, forty-one reported that they integrate diversity issues into "many" or "all" of their courses. However, only twenty-four of these were specific as to "how" they accomplished this or how much time they devoted to this material. At the University of Arkansas-Little Rock, for example, the respondent reported that a course entitled "Journalistic Freedom and Responsibility" devotes four classes (160 minutes each) per semester to women, African Americans, and minorities. At Concordia University in Montreal, one-fourth to one-half the semester is devoted to diversity issues in its courses "Communication Theory" and "Documentary Film and TV;" one-eighth the semester is devoted to diversity in its course "Communication and Popular Culture." Bradley University reported that it devotes 40 percent of the semester to diversity issues in a basic communication studies course that is taken by all university students.

Of all the programs responding that their policy is to integrate diversity into the curriculum, the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University,

was the most detailed, reporting that it devotes between 10 percent and 20 percent of each semester to diversity, women, minorities, and African Americans in ten of its basic courses in the advertising, broadcast, and journalism programs. "Increasingly I've been conscious of introducing stories by women and racial... minorities into writing classes...," reported Medill's Abe Peck. "I've also tried to weave these elements into publishing: e.g. an opening overview of magazines with 80 slides includes covers from *Emerge, Essence, New Asian-Americans,* and women's magazines from mainstream to lesbian." Dick Schwarzloze, also of Medill, wrote: "In both my classes -- History of Mass Comm. and Government and the News Media -- I regularly run hypotheticals and discussions concerning bias in the coverage of minorities, women, and gays and lesbians."

Others, however, reported that despite good intentions, diversity and minority issues sometimes get squeezed out of a packed course. "[Our] survey of Mass Comm barely mentions minorities and women..." wrote Nancy Jones, chair of the Journalism and Communications Department at Point Park College in Pittsburgh. "[There is] just too much to cover in the course. Students are encouraged to pursue these areas in [their] own research papers for [this] as well as other courses."

A few programs reported that AEJMC accreditation standards limited their flexibility for offering such courses. "It is very difficult for accredited undergraduate institutions to devote a specific course to the subject because of the 30-hour limit placed on journalism courses," wrote Hampden H. Smith III, head of Journalism and Mass Communication at Washington and Lee University. His sentiments were echoed by Watkins of the University of Arkansas, who responded: "Accreditation requirements limit what we can offer. We have to focus on skills."

Conclusions, Future Study

a future survey might be addressed to faculty, asking them whether they have ever proposed, developed, or taught a course on minorities or diversity, and what the outcome was. Was the course offered? Was it added as a permanent course to the curriculum? What kinds of students took the course?

Other questions to pursue might address the level of awareness of diversity issues among students involved in these courses. For example, does integration of the program provide awareness and arouse interest and respect of the group being studied? How do students in an "integrated" curriculum compare in level of diversity awareness to students enrolled in specific courses explicitely treating minority groups and diversity? Does this material affect different population groups within the student body differently, and if so, how? Another direction for study might be to chart the course of students exposed to this material. Does it affect their decisions concerning life choices and lifestyles? Does it affect their performance as professional communicators?

One thing is clear. If the media continue to come under fire for their inability to cover minority groups and diversity issues in a serious and responsible fashion, journalism and mass communication programs will also continue to come under fire for their failure to to prepare their students for such a task. Whether integrating diversity and minority issues in the curriculum or offering specific courses treating these issues, journalism and mass communication programs must continue to examine and assess what they are doing in this area.

NOTES

1.This percentage is probably high, since in programs where more than one course was offered, the same student might take more than one course and thus be counted twice.

2.One school listed a course, "HIV and AIDS," offered jointly with Fine Arts, as a course dealing with gays and lesbians, but this was excluded from the count since it failed to mention if the course dealt with the media and would not appear to be a course on diversity.

3.To compare the various categories of programs (large vs. small, public v. private) a ratio was created by dividing the number of courses offered each year by the group by the number of programs in the group. Based on this formula, private insitutions showed a ration of 1.43 courses per year per program vs. 1.22 courses in public institutions.

4.Large private institutions had a ratio of 1.78 courses per year per program.

5.Large public institutions had a ratio of 1.6.

6.The ratio for private institutions was 1.46; for public institutions it was only 0.88.

7. Public institutions had a ratio of 1.22; small private institutions had a ratio of just 0.9.

8.Standard 12 reads, in part, that programs must "include in their courses information about the major contributions made by minorities and women to the disciplines covered in the unit..." and that "The contributions of women and minorities must be integrated throughout the unit's program." ("Standard 12: Minority/Female Representation," *Accredited Journalism and Communications Education: 1995-96,* Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications, 1995, 33.)

APPENDIX A: Respondents to Survey

Dept. of Journalism, University of Arkansas-Fayetteville; Dept. of Journalism, University of Arkansas-Little Rock; College of Communication, California State University-Chico; Dept. of Mass Comm. and Journalism, California State University-Fresno; Communication Department, Pacific Union College; Communication Division, Pepperdine University; Media Division, University of San Francisco; Dept. of Journalism, San Francisco State University; Dept. of Communication, Santa Clara University; Dept. of Comm. Arts, California Lutheran University; School of Communication, University of Hartford; Dept. of Journalism, Howard University; School of Journalism and Mass Comm., Florida International University; Dept. of Journalism, University of Hawaii-Manoa; Dept. of Communication, Bradley University; Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University; Journalism and Communication Studies, Roosevelt University; College of Mass Comm. and Media Arts, Southern Illinois University; Dept. of Mass Comm., Southern Illinois University; School of Journalism and Mass Comm., University of Iowa; School of Journalism and Mass Comm., Kansas State University; Dept. of Journalism/RTV, Murray State University; Dept. of Journalism, Western Kentucky University; Dept. of Mass Comm., Grambling State University; School of Communication, Northeast Louisiana University; Writing and Media Dept., Loyola College; College of Journalism, University of Maryland-College Park; Dept. of Journalism, University of Massachusetts-Amherst; Mass Comm. Dept., Moorhead State University; Dept. of Communication, Alcorn State University; Dept. of Communication, Maryville University; Communication Dept., University of Missouri; Dept. of Communication Studies, University of Missouri; Dept. of Mass Comm., Southeast Missouri State U.; Dept. of Journalism, Webster University; Dept. of Media Communications, Webster University; Dept. of Journalism & Mass Comm., U of Nebraska-Kearney; Greenspun School of Comm., University of Nevada-Las Vegas; Dept. of Communication, William Paterson College; Dept. of Communication, Buffalo State College; Dept. of Communication, Cornell University; Dept. of Journalism and Mass Comm., St. Bonaventure University; Journalism Program, East Carolina University; School of Journalism and Mass Comm.; Dept. of Mass Comm., University of North Carolina; School of Communication, University of North Dakota; Dept. of Journalism, Bowling Green State University; School of Journalism, Ohio State University; Speech Communication Dept., Southern Nazarene University; Dept. of Communication Studies, University of Portland; Dept. of Communication, Southern Oregon State College; Dept. of Journalism, Indiana University of Pennsylvania; Dept. of Journalism and Mass Comm., Lock Haven University; College of Communication, Pennsylvania State University; Dept. of Journalism, Temple University; Dept. of Journalism and Communication, Point Park College; Dept. of Journalism, University of Rhode Island; College of Journalism and Mass Comm., University of South Carolina; Communication Dept., University of Tennessee; Journalism Curriculum, Tennessee Tech. University; Dept. of Communication, Houston Baptist University; Dept. of Communication, Prairie View A&M University; School of Communication, Texas Southern University; Mass Comm. Program, Texas Woman's University; Dept. of Art, Communication & Theater, West Texas A&M University; Dept. of Mass Comm. and Journalism, Norfolk State University; Dept. of Journalism and Mass Comm.; Washington & Lee University; Communication Department, Seattle University; Dept. of Journalism, Western Washington University; Dept. of Agricultural Journalism, University of Wisconin-Madison; Journalism Department, Concordia University; Grad. School of Journalism, University of Western Ontario.